

In profile, IDRC awardee Archana Dwivedi



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In January, 1993, Young Canadian Researcher Archana Dwivedi travelled to the Udaipar District of Rajasthan state in northwest India. For the next seven months she would undertake field research on the effects of community participation on health programs. In addition to producing insights with useful application in the design health programs, Archana's field research in India has been a formative period in initiating her career in the field of health and development.

Archana's research was motivated by the observation that standard health and nutrition programs are inadequate to meet the needs of the absolute poor in rural India. Setting out to illustrate how public involvement in health programs encourages their effective application and sustainability, Archana proposed to assess and compare two participatory health and nutrition programs in Udaipar district: one implemented by a government operation (Integrated Child Development Services), the other by a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Seva Mandir.

The research findings suggest that rural health care in India may be improved by devoting more resources to local organizations and NGOs, because the greater degree of local participation can make health programs both more effective and less costly. However, both government and NGO-based programs are considered essential in increasing health and welfare and they both seek to involve the local population. Nevertheless, they have different strengths and different approaches. ICDS is a centralized program which targets general needs such as immunization, basic food for children and cleaning-up drinking water. But ICDS tends not to address the particular needs of individual villages and participation is limited by people's expectations that the government will provide health-care in a top-down fashion. Seva Mandir, by contrast, is perceived by the villagers as a program in which they should be actively involved because it encourages them to participate and organize around their health concerns.

Archana points to education as a crucial element both to the success of the Seva Mandir program and to general health improvement in the Indian context since many health problems can be alleviated by improved knowledge in such areas as proper nutrition and sanitary methods. However, rather than arguing that NGO programs should replace those of the government, Archana contends that they are complementary in that NGOs can fill the gaps left by government programs.

Today Archana is a Project Officer in the Food Aid Centre of the Multilateral Programs Branch of CIDA. Specifically, she is writing a guide on "Assessing Results of Food Aid Centre Programs" and designing a program aimed at alleviating health problems in several developing countries.

Archana links much of her present success to her experience as a YCRA recipient. As Archana herself stated, not only did the YCRA "help to shape the most important aspect of my training... field experience... and it also provided me with the skills and confidence I needed to pursue my present career." Among the tools garnered from her work in India are: research, analysis, reporting skills, budgeting, a knowledge of health issues, personal contacts and an awareness of the flexibility required to adapt to another culture.

While her interest in international development was sparked by childhood visits to rural India, the spark was ignited when she received the YCRA. Archana underscores the important role the YCRA program plays in fostering in its alumni a commitment to respond to the priorities of developing countries. She sees herself as part of the development, health and nutrition field for years to come.

Moreover, Archana's experience clearly demonstrates that the YCRA cultivates a component of the Canadian workforce which is adept in skills whose applications go beyond conducting field research in the developing world. They also facilitate the effective and ethical involvement of Canadian society in today's globalized world.

Archana Dwivedi is a shining example of how active support of young Canadian researchers lays the groundwork for future progress in the field of sustainable and equitable development.

Source: [IDRC Training and Awards Unit](#)